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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 002202

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/11/2017
TAGS: PGOV KDEM PHUM SOCI RS
SUBJECT: AUTHORITIES DETERMINED TO PREVENT SAMARA
DEMONSTRATION DURING EU - RUSSIA SUMMIT

Classified By: Pol M/C Alice G. Wells. Reason: 1.4 (b).

¶1. (C) Summary: GOR authorities have reacted forcefully to Other Russia organizers' determination to hold a demonstration in Samara on May 18, during the EU - Russia summit. Authorities have detained some of the organizers, imposed tough sentences on two organizers alleged to have violated their parole, and pressganged one into the military.

Pamphleteers have been arrested for distributing "extremist" material, the NGO Golos's Samara office was raided, three journalists were detained for a lengthy identification check, and the office of one newspaper sympathetic to the demonstration searched. Human rights contacts believe that Other Russia will attempt to go forward with the demonstration nevertheless, but their efforts are likely to be nipped in the bud. End summary.

GOR Gives Unequivocal Message

¶2. (SBU) Since Other Russia announced on May 3 its intent to hold a demonstration in Samara on May 18, during the EU - Russia summit in the same city, GOR authorities have worked overtime to disrupt the organizers' plans. Law enforcement and local authorities:

-- prevented participants from attending the press conference announcing the demonstration;

-- refused permission to Other Russia organizers to hold a demonstration in central Samara on the evening of May 18. They instead offered a stadium on the city's outskirts on May 21, after the Russia - EU Summit.

-- detained three Other Russia organizers on May 8. On May 10, two other organizers, who were found to have violated their parole, were jailed. Ilya Guryev, a member of the outlawed National Bolshevik Party, has been sentenced to six months in a penal colony, and Mikhail Gangan was placed under house arrest, which is effective from 2200 to 0600 daily. A third organizer was pronounced fit for army service.

¶3. (C) On May 10, Golos's Samara office was searched, and office computers were confiscated, allegedly because Golos did not have the proper software licenses. Samara Golos Director Lyudmila Kuzmina told us May 11 that normal militia were not involved in the raid, which she traced to Golos's defense of the organizers' constitutional right to demonstrate.

¶4. (C) On May 10, Samara printing houses were searched for demonstration-related publications. On May 11, three journalists, a local Kommersant correspondent and two Ren-TV crewmembers were detained for an identification check. The media reported they were released later the same day. Also

on May 11, Ekho Moskvy's Samara Editor Tatyana Prokopovichene told us that the local authorities' forceful response had raised doubts about whether the demonstration would go forward, and noted that, even absent interference, the likelihood of a large turnout had been slim, given that the local population was "more interested in their dachas, than in politics." She noted that with the exception of Ekho and local newspaper Novaya Gazeta, regional media were not covering the developments. Novaya Gazeta's sympathetic coverage of the proposed demonstration, and the organizational role of the Editor's daughter had precipitated the raid by the police. Prokopovichene stressed that officials were not responding to charges levied by civil society activists that the various raids were conducted without warrants.

Observers Unlikely to be Present

¶ 15. (C) Both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have told us that they believe the participants will attempt to hold the demonstration as announced, but believe it unlikely that many will succeed in reaching the site. Amnesty International's Fredericke Behr said that Amnesty is attempting to determine if restrictions that the GOR has imposed are measures necessary (pursuant to EU law) to secure the safety of summit participants. Our German Embassy counterparts have indicated that they will try to approach the GOR on an informal level, but were pessimistic about having an impact.

¶ 16. (C) In a May 11 conversation, Moscow Helsinki Group's Lyudmila Alekseyeva ascribed Samara Other Russia's troubles

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in part to the inexperience and youth of its National Bolshevik Party organizers. Also making them easy picking for the authorities, she said, was the absence of a network of Samara-based human rights group on whom the organizers could rely. Alekseyeva said that "For Human Rights" leader Lev Ponomarev would travel May 12 to Samara in an attempt to aid the flailing locals. She planned to strategize May 12 with Other Russia's Garry Kasparov, who was scheduled to return to Moscow from the United States on May 11. The Moscow-based Union of Soldier's Mothers would aid the one organizer who had been pressganged into the military, illegally Alekseyeva maintained.

Comment

¶ 17. (C) The EU - Russia Samara summit has further stiffened the resolve of authorities unlikely, even under different circumstances, of allowing an Other Russia demonstration to go forward in less than completely controlled circumstances. Even had the demonstration been allowed to take place, it likely would have gone unnoticed by the EU - Russia summiteers, who are scheduled to hold their conclave at a recreational facility far from the city center.

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